

The Epistle to the Hebrews

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(To supplement Dr. Caroline Palmer's Bible Study Guide,

The New and Living Way)

Key verse: Hebrews 4:14
 "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession." (R.V.S.)

Basic structure of Hebrews:

I. *Jesus the Son is Lord* (1:1-4:13)

A. As God's last word, he is superior to prophets. (1:1-3)

1. They spoke for God in times past.

2. He speaks as God, now, at the end.

B. As God's supreme word, he is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)

1. They serve; he rules. (1:4-2:5)

(The first warning: Listen to Jesus! 2:1-5)

2. The Lord became servant (lower than angels) to save. (2:5-18)

C. As God's victorious word, he is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)

1. Moses was servant; He is the Son. (3:1-6)

2. Moses failed to enter Canaan: Jesus brings us to heaven itself.

(3:7-4:13)

(The second warning: Don't fail Jesus! 3:7-4:13)

II. *Jesus our Priest is Saviour* (4:14-10:18)

A. He is the fulfillment of the old Priesthood. (4:14-6:20)

(The third warning: Press on to maturity, to new truths. 5:11-6:20)

B. His new priesthood is superior to the old. (7:1-10:18)

1. He is priest of a higher order than Aaron. (7)

2. He is mediator of a higher covenant. (8)

3. He is a better sacrifice for sin. (9:1-10:18)

III. *Therefore have faith!* (10:19-13:25)

A. Have faith in Jesus. (10:19-39)

B. Remember the heroes of the faith. (11)

C. Hope in the Kingdom that cannot be shaken. (12)

D. Let brotherly love continue. (13)

"*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*"

Summary in five great points, or Hebrews "in a nutshell":

I. Jesus Is Lord (Chs. 1-4)

II. Jesus Is Priest (Chs. 5-10)

III. Therefore: Have Faith (Ch. 11)

Have Hope (Ch. 12)

Have Love (Ch. 13)

A. The first two points are *great points of faith*.

B. The last three points are *three great rules of life*.

JESUS IS LORD (Chs. 1-4)—*first great point of faith*

I. First great lesson of Hebrews—Jesus Christ is *Lord*. The theme of the first four chapters.

II. Interpretation: The book of Hebrews is a warning against giving up the Christian faith and particularly, against falling back into a lower, pre-Christian faith, the faith of the Old Testament, the old Covenant. The author of Hebrews does not condemn the old, for God spoke and worked through Old Testament prophets and angels, through Moses and Joshua and Aaron. But that is not enough, says Hebrews. It is incomplete. It is inferior. We have a better way.

III. We have Jesus Christ, and *He is Lord*.

A. He is better than the *prophets*.

Hebrews 1:1-4, first point.

B. He is better than the *angels*.

Hebrews 1:5-2:18, second point.

C. He is better than *Moses*.

Hebrews 3:1-4:13, third comparison.

IV. Five great warnings:

A. Listen to Jesus. (2:1-4)

B. Don't fail Jesus. (3:7-4:13)

C. Group up; and don't forsake Jesus. (5:11-6:20)

D. Stand firm for Jesus. (10:26-39)

E. Don't reject Jesus Christ. (12:14-29)

V. Conclusion: There is triumph and victory in this first great lesson of the book of Hebrews: Jesus the Son is Lord. The final note is victory: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... [and] let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (4:14, 16, R.S.V.)

JESUS IS PRIEST (4:14-10:18)—second great point of faith

I. The second great lesson of Hebrews is that Jesus is *Priest*—the theme of chapters 5 to 10.

II. Interpretation:

A. The distinct change of mood and emphasis that governs this whole section really begins with Hebrews 4:14 (the key text containing all three great points: Lord, Priest, and Faith). The change of mood is from command to sympathy; from a supreme Lord who demands our absolute allegiance, to a priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses. (4:15)

B. God is saying in Hebrews, "You need a priest." Why?

1. We need a priest because we have lost the way, and when we have lost our way, then Jesus our great High Priest becomes our Way, a "new and living way." (10:20).

2. Is priesthood obsolete in the twentieth century? Not in our world. Whenever a man at last sees himself as he really is—a sinner, he needs a priest.

3. Another nutshell in Hebrews: We need a priest; we have a perfect priest in Jesus Christ; and having him, we need no other priest.

4. Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ does bring us to God. *How* does he do this, we ask. In two ways, says Hebrews:

a. He does it with a promise of mercy. This is the new covenant. (Ch. 8)

b. He does it with a sacrifice. This is the new covenant in his blood. (9-10:18)

III. The most difficult part of Hebrews (Chs. 9-10).

A. Interpretation:

1. If you can get through 9 and 10 into chapter 11; if you can get through sacrifice into faith, then you have the Letter to the Hebrews. It takes both.

2. This question comes to our minds:

a. Why can't we have the mercy without the blood?

b. Thus, we ask, "Can't we have Christianity without the Cross?" We cannot cut out the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and have anything left of Christianity.

3. Let me say this much briefly about the doctrine of atonement: a. I don't always understand the Cross; but the Cross helps me to understand sin. It reminds me of the "exceeding seriousness of sin"—the Son of God himself had to die for it.

b. I don't always understand the Cross, but the Cross helps me to understand life. I know that there may come a Cross in my life no matter how good a Christian I am. There was a Cross in my Lord's life.

FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE—Rules of life

I. The outline:

A. Therefore have faith. (10:19-13:25)

1. Faith is belief and trust. (11)

2. Faith brings *Hope*. (12)

3. Faith issues in *Love*. (13)

II. Interpretation:

A. Everybody knows, I guess, that you cannot be a Christian without faith. It is faith that makes us Christians. But what is faith? If it is really as important as that, we should know what it is. But the very structure of Hebrews reminds us that the really important thing about faith is not what it is; but what it is *in*. The kind of faith Hebrews talks about is not just any faith. It is faith in Jesus Christ. That is why for the first ten chapters we have been studying Jesus Christ, not faith. But it all hangs together: Jesus is Lord; Jesus is Priest; have faith in *him*.

B. Now look at faith itself. Hebrews says two important things about faith. First, it is "the conviction of things not seen": that is *belief* (11:1). And second, it is taking God at his word, like Abel and Enoch and Noah and

c. I don't always understand the Cross, but the Cross helps me to understand the justice of God. It is never easy to forgive sin, and be just. The easy thing is to excuse sin, and let injustice run wild. This is exactly what the Communists accuse us sentimental Christians of doing. "You Christians," they say, "have no justice; you have only love. And love is a weak thing. It excuses injustice. It takes hatred to root out injustice. It takes hatred to change the world." But the Communists are wrong. There can be justice without hatred. It takes sacrifice, yes, but not hatred. And there can be love without weak sentiment. There is nothing sentimental

d. I don't always understand the Cross, but the Cross helps me to understand the wonderful love of God. I know that it makes some people think of him only as an angry God demanding blood. But I can only remember that it might have been my blood, for it was my sin; but he gave his own life for me. And that is the greatest love I have ever known.

e. So finally, let me say that though I do not always understand the Cross, I understand that the Cross is not the end. We have moved through chapter 8, the happy story of the new covenant; then down into bloody chapter 9 with its unperfumed picture of the Cross; now to chapter 10:12, and here is the climax: "When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God." (R.S.V.)

and all the rest: that is trust. Faith, in Hebrews, is *belief*, and *trust*. It is a *confident belief*.

C. Move on to chapter 12. Move on from faith to hope, for faith *brings* hope. 1. "In such a time as this," says the World Council of Churches, "the Church of Jesus Christ cannot but speak of hope. He is our hope, in him we are bound to proclaim that hope to the world."

D. Hebrews ends with love. The 13th chapter begins by telling us to love each other. It tells you to love your husbands. It tells you *not* to love money too much.

E. Retain your hope, and all the Communist armies in the world cannot destroy your peace. But lack of love can.

Therefore, let us love one another . . .

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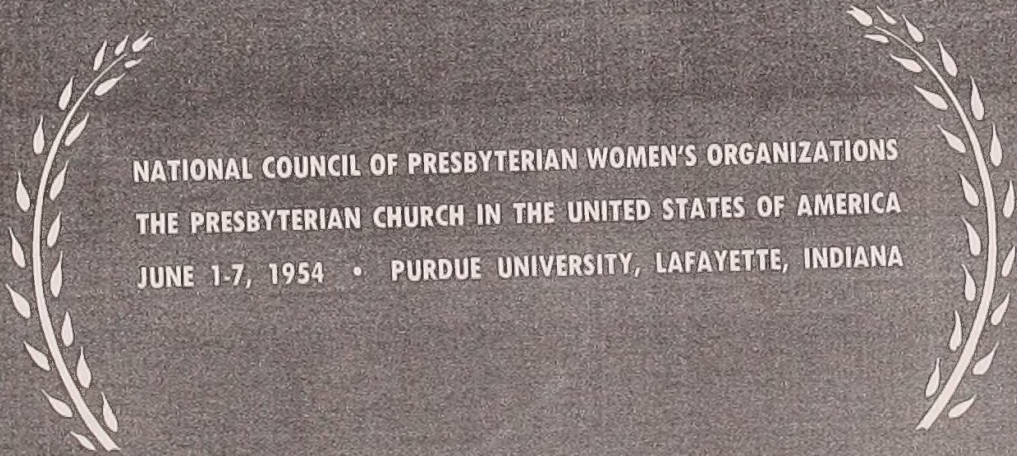
WE FIND CHRIST'S WAY—TOGETHER

SECTION 4

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Christ is the Way

THE REPORT • NATIONAL MEETING



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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